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ABSTRACT

In 1989, a study was conducted at Saddleback College (SC) to determine whether an English composition course should be established as a prerequisite for the introductory U.S. history course at SC. Subjects for the study consisted of 314 students who entered the college in fall 1988 and enrolled in one of the two introductory U.S. history courses during spring 1989. A review of the students transcripts showed that 154 students had not completed an English composition course, but had an assessment score on file, and that 102 students had successfully completed an English composition course. Major findings were as follows: (1) 69% of those who received recommendations to take English 1A were successful in the history course, compared to 63% of those recommended to take a course one level below English 1A (English 1LB) and 52% of those recommended to take a course two levels below English 1A (English 2LB); (2) of the students who had successfully completed English 1A or English 1LB, 77% were successful in the history class, while 73% of those who completed English 2LB were successful in the history class; and (3) only 52% of the students who neither completed an English composition course nor took the English composition assessment test successfully completed the history course. The data did not support the establishment of a particular skill level in English composition as a prerequisite for the introductory U.S. history course at SC. (JMC)

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An Analysis of History Course Success Based on English Eligibility

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Summary of Key Observations

The data did not support the establishment of an English composition course prerequisite for the introductory United States history course at Saddleback College. The variations in the history course success rates as a function of either English composition course level previously completed or composition course recommended through the assessment process were found to not be significant. However, those who had completed a composition course at any level had a significantly higher probability of successfully completing the history course than those who had not. It is not known whether this dependence is unique to English composition. It might be that those students who have demonstrated the ability to complete courses at Saddleback College are more likely to continue that behavior in the history course.

Procedure

A total of 973 students enrolled in the two introductory United States history courses (Basic United States History and History of the United States to 1876) at Saddleback College during the spring, 1989 semester. Of these individuals, 314 had entered the college as new students during the fall, 1988 term. This group of 314 new students formed the sample for this study. A review of the transcripts for each of these students was used to find their final grade in the history course. Further, the transcript was used to determine if they had successfully completed an English composition course at the college during the

fall, 1988 term. This was the case for 102 (thirty-two percent) of these students. For 154 of the remaining 212 students it was possible to determine an English composition assessment test score. Consequently, the recommended course placement level was known for each of these 154 students. It was not possible to identify the English composition skill level for fifty-eight of the students in the sample who had not completed an English composition course the previous semester.

Students were considered successful in the history course if they completed it with a grade of C or better. Students who, for any reason, dropped, withdrew or received a grade other than A, B, or C were considered unsuccessful. Because it was not possible to know why a student dropped or withdrew, it was not possible to segregate those who had academic difficulty from those who did not. It should be noted that students who stopped attending after the last day permissible to withdraw from classes could not be assigned a grade of W (i.e. Withdraw) by the instructor and consequently may have received a grade of F. Thus the failing grade, F, may have reflected a student's attendance record rather than the level of difficulty the student had meeting the requirements of the class.

Results

First, consider the 154 students who had not completed an English composition course, but for whom an assessment score was available. The rates at which this group of students were successful in the U.S. history course as a function of the level

of English composition placement they received through the assessment process were found to decrease as the level of the recommended composition course decreased. Sixty-nine percent of those who received recommendations to take English 1A were successful in the history course. This success rate was sixty-three percent for those who were recommended to take the course one level below English 1A, hereafter referred to as English 1LB. At Saddleback College this course was titled English 200. Of those who were placed two levels below English 1A, hereafter referred to as English 2LB, fifty-two percent were successful in the history course. At Saddleback College there were two courses at this level: English 300 and English 220. These results were placed in table 1.

Table 1

Percent of Students Achieving Successful U.S. History Grades by English Level based on Assessment Scores

English Level*	% Successful in History
English 1A	69% (N = 32)
English 1LB	63% (N = 60)
English 2LB	52% (N = 62)

* "LB" stands for level below Freshman Composition

The independence of student success in the history course taken and the level of English composition course recommended was investigated using the appropriate statistical test. While there was a fair amount of variation in the success rates as shown in

table 1, this variation was found to not be statistically significant. Thus there was not sufficient evidence to reject the claim that history course success and the level of composition course recommended were independent. In other words, knowledge of the composition assessment score for a student was not useful in determining the likelihood the student would be successful in the history course.

Consider next the 102 students who had successfully completed an English composition course at Saddleback College. The rates at which this group were successful in the U.S. history course as a function of the level of English composition class they had successfully completed were found to be fairly constant over the level of courses completed. Seventy-seven percent of those who had successfully completed English 1A were successful in the history course. This success rate was the same for those who had completed the English 1LB course. Of those who had successfully completed the English 2LB course, seventy-three percent were successful in the history course. These results were placed in table 2.

The independence of student success in the history course and the level of English composition course successfully completed was investigated using the appropriate statistical test. Because there was only a small variation in the success rates as shown in table 2, it was not surprising that this variation was found to not be statistically significant. Thus there was not sufficient evidence to reject the claim that history course success and the level of composition course completed were independent. In other

Table 2

Percent of Students Achieving Successful U.S. History Grades by English Level based on Prior English Course Completion

English Level**	% Successful in History
English 1A	77% (N = 30)
English 1LB	77% (N = 35)
English 2LB	73% (N = 37)

** Students have successfully completed English courses at these levels.

words, knowledge of the level of composition course in which the student had been successful was not useful in determining the likelihood the student would be successful in the history course.

It was interesting to note that only fifty-two percent of the fifty-eight students who had neither completed an English composition course at Saddleback College, or taken the English composition assessment test, successfully completed the history course.

Those students who had successfully completed an English composition course at any level were generally more successful in the history course than those students who had not completed such a course. Of the 102 students who had completed a composition course during the fall, 1988 term, seventy-five percent successfully completed the history course in the spring, 1989 term. This success rate was only fifty-eight percent for those who had not completed a composition course. The independence of successful English composition course completion and successful history course completion was tested. There was found to be

sufficient evidence to reject the claim that they were independent. Consequently the variation in the success rates was found to be significant. In other words, a student who completed a composition course the previous semester was more likely to successfully complete the history course than a student who had not yet completed such a course.

Conclusion and Discussion

The data did not tend to support the establishment of a particular skill level in English composition as a prerequisite for the introductory United States history course at Saddleback College. However, those who had completed a composition course at any level had a significantly higher probability of successfully completing the history course than those who had not completed such a course. It is not known whether this dependence is unique to English composition. It might be that those students who have demonstrated the ability to complete courses at Saddleback College are more likely to continue that behavior in the history course.

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